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1971/05/25

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY May 25, 1971

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
M. and Mme. John Paul Sainteny
Brig. General Alexander M. Haig
W. Richard Smyser, NSC Staff
Winston Lord, NSC Staff

PLACE: Dr. Kissinger's Office

TIME: Luncheon, May 25, 1971

Substantive portions of the luncheon conversation centered on Vietnam and China. Following are the highlights of M. Sainteny's observations.

Vietnam

M. Sainteny said that:

-- Hanoi does not fully believe that the Americans will leave Vietnam. If they were assured of that and of a certain number of seats for the NLF in the Assembly, they would come to terms on POWs, ceasefire, and the separation of the two Vietnams for a number of years. (M. Sainteny actually was somewhat ambiguous about North Vietnamese political demands but appeared to suggest that Assembly representation might satisfy them for the time being anyway.)

-- The NLF is really quite independent of North Vietnam and there could be significant differences between them. However, M. Sainteny thought Hanoi would be willing to deal with us without the NLF.

-- The North Vietnamese are still determined to pursue their struggle although he sensed a certain degree of uncertainty. Le Duan is in charge, but he clearly does not have the authority of Ho Chi Minh.

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5
NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Gn.
By ___, NARA, Date 12/20/99

-- The extensive corruption in South Vietnam gives the non-corrupt North Vietnamese an advantage with the South Vietnamese people. The GVN is so tarnished that it would be better from our standpoint to see it replaced. There are good people in South Vietnam and Paris; for example, Big Minh, who, while not brilliant, is popular.

-- Madame Binh is tough; Xuan Thuy is enigmatic; Mai Van Bo's replacement is not up to his standard.

-- In response to Dr. Kissinger's query whether Hanoi might fear its traditional enemies, China and Japan, Mme. Sainteny did not believe this was an important factor. She did not think that the North Vietnamese feared China, and with Japan their concern was only in the economic realm. On the other hand, they believe that the Americans have reasons to stay in Vietnam, including their anticommunism and their position as world leader.

China

Mr. Sainteny said the following:

-- The US moves concerning China were good, and we were now on a good path.

-- With the Chinese, if you knock on one door they will open another one. Thus, while the Chinese Ambassador in Paris had merely transmitted Dr. Kissinger's note without comment, M. Sainteny believed the approach through him had been very efficacious with respect to recent events.

-- Chou En-lai has been clearly in charge since the Cultural Revolution, with Mao now being old.

-- The Chinese will blow hot and cold in their dealings with us. We should multiply our gestures toward them to show our good will; he cited as an example that his company wished to sell helicopters to the Chinese, but were prevented by COCOM restrictions because an American license was needed for certain parts.

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Dr. Kissinger said that M. Sainteny could tell the Chinese that the US will look positively at these trade questions. We will be freeing some trade items, although we cannot guarantee to free them all and will not release any with military significance.

After Lunch

After lunch, M. Sainteny remained for further private conversation with Dr. Kissinger. During that conversation he asked Dr. Kissinger whether he could tell Ambassador Bruce and Xuan Thuy that he had occasional contact with Dr. Kissinger. Dr. Kissinger said that he could tell those people.

Dr. Kissinger asked M. Sainteny whether we could use him to get a message to the Chinese very fast if we needed to. M. Sainteny said he thought he could get to the Chinese quickly enough to deliver any urgent message, and that he would be pleased to do it.

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